

THE MAN WITH THE MASTER MIND

BEING THE CHRONICLES OF CARLTON CLARKE, TELEPATHO-DEDUCTIVE SOLVER OF CRIMINAL MYSTERIES.

THE SQUARE TRIANGLE



It certainly looked black for Arthur Edgerton. Even Clarke, who usually, I find, is inclined to let his sympathies rest with the accused until all shadow of doubt is dispelled, was hard put to find excuses for him. We discussed the case, recorded in glaring headlines, over our morning meal.

"It's incomprehensible," he said, as he read the third time the damning details. "His whole life, his success, his approaching marriage, everything cries out against this crime."

"So they did in the case of Eugene Aram," I replied, "and yet Aram protested his innocence. If Edgerton is not guilty, it should be a simple matter for him to account for his whereabouts from 7:30 to 10 last night, but this he refuses to do. I am of the opinion that for the police have shown commendable energy and nabbed the right man. Can you imagine a more convincing chain of circumstantial evidence?"

"I don't have to imagine. The history of circumstantial evidence contains many a more perfect chain which was only broken after an innocent man had been hanged."

"Then again," he continued, "what do you make of the robbery? If through jealousy Edgerton killed Garner, why should he rifle his pockets, tear out a diamond stud, and wrench the ring off his finger like a common freeloader?"

"That might have been the work of some one else who arrived on the scene after the murderer had fled," I suggested.

"A stronger argument on your side would be that it was done to throw the police off the track. But we argue to no purpose, and I, for one, propose to await the sequel."

It was the old, old story, the fatal triangle, in the demonstration of which tragedy has been the corollary since the world began—two men and one woman.

Arthur Edgerton possessed the three almost priceless talismans to the gates of modern society: youth, good looks, and wealth; and these had won for him the master-key: social position, despite the handicap of antecedents unknown, some said, even doubtful.

Harrison Garner put into the balance against these: wealth, a family name honored for generations, and an unblemished character. Edgerton's brilliancy he offset by unfailing good humor and wholesomeness.

Mazie Morrison, secure in her own little social realm and with no lack of suitors for the hand of its queen, had played one against the other. She had flattered the gossips by accepting Edgerton, and then set their tongues wagging faster than ever by receiving both on equal terms, despite the cards and the ring and all the delightful, bothersome preliminaries to matrimony.

Murder Has Been Done.

And then the sequel: Garner found shot through the heart in Edgerton's automobile on a lonely spot on the Lake Shore drive; Edgerton, blood bespattered, behind prison bars, and Mazie Morrison, weeping, inconsolable, distraught, in her pretty boudoir, stunned at the havoc her little hands had wrought in three lives. This was the picture I painted that summer morning at the breakfast table. Later I found the canvas wanted retouching sadly.

Ignoring the futility of the argument, Clarke and I prolonged our discussion of the case in the library over our cigars, where we were interrupted by the sound of carriage wheels. Clarke's dark features lighted with expectancy. I wondered if his remarkable presence told him that the vehicle stopping at our entrance held any connection for us with the tragedy of the night before. Or was I absorbing a portion of his sensitive intelligence?

Yes, the call was for us. The bell rang and we heard our servant, who at this period chanced to be a Jap boy, blandly answering a feminine voice which inquired for Mr. Carlton Clarke. Our visitor was heavily veiled, and as Clarke stepped forward to offer her a chair, I was able to judge nothing of her personality beyond that she was young and owned a figure, a face, and suggesting through thick costume, animal-like lines and curves, or was it the art of the dressmaker exemplified in a perfectly gowned woman?

"I am Miss Mazie Morrison, Mr. Clarke," she said sadly, lifting her veil from a face, the beauty of which even the evident traces of tears could not mar, and brushing back her dark, rebellious hair with a dainty little hand, on which sparkled an engagement ring.

"Yes, Miss Morrison, I am glad you have called on me. It is about the Edgerton case, I suppose," replied Clarke, while I discreetly retired behind the portiere of my bedroom door.

"O, yes, Mr. Clarke. You have seen the papers. You know the terrible trouble I am in. It seems that no one can help me, but I heard papa and brother Joe talking about what you did for Richard King and I have come to you. I had a perfectly dreadful time slipping away from home. I am watched by the police, and even by my own family, but I know Arthur did not do that dreadful thing and I simply had to talk with some one who would believe me. You don't think he did it, do you?"

"Miss Morrison, I do not know, but, for your sake, I propose to find out if there is any hope."

"Oh, do, Mr. Clarke, and I will pay you anything. I am wedded by my own right and they cannot prevent me from giving it all to save Arthur."

"The question of payment, Miss Morrison, is of the smallest consequence."

quence. Services such as mine cannot be ticketed with a price and sold as commodities. I will serve you just as willingly if nothing is said on the financial side. Now, if we are to fight this battle against circumstances, first let us take an account of our resources. I will repeat to you the evidence contained in the newspaper reports, and you are to tell me wherein it tallies with the facts and to give me any further information you can. Are you strong enough for the ordeal?"

Miss Morrison's Story.

"O, yes, Mr. Clarke. I am strong enough for anything if it will prove Arthur innocent."

"Then I will call my confrere, Mr. Sexton, to take notes and we will go over the case in detail."

I was easily found, for though pretending to read, I admit I was taking in the conversation from my position behind the portiere.

"Now then," continued Clarke, "the papers say that Mr. Edgerton called at your apartment building, the Patio, at 7:30 o'clock last night. That he found Garner there and stayed only about ten minutes. That he and Garner left together, entered Edgerton's automobile, and started north. Now what occurred during those ten minutes?"

"Ah, Mr. Clarke. It happened just as the papers say, only they have added so many horrible things that are not so. They say Arthur was insanely jealous of Harrison and that he left me in a rage. He wasn't a bit jealous. He knew Harrison still called on me as an old friend of our family, and he said he thoroughly approved of it, and that he knew he had all my love. He was acting strangely last night, but he remarked that he was worrying over some business troubles. He scarcely spoke ten words to me, and when I asked him about an engagement we had for next Thursday evening he could not remember what it was and claimed he had forgotten all about it. I thought this strange, for he never forgets anything. When Mr. Garner rose to go Arthur said he was on his way to see a man on an important business matter in Edgewater, and offered to take Mr. Garner in his machine to his home on Wilson avenue. I remember thinking this was odd, for he never before mentioned business in the evening."

"Had Mr. Edgerton any business troubles?"

"None that I know of. Papa said just the other evening that his factory had orders enough ahead to run it a year."

"Now, Miss Morrison, did you notice anything else strange in his actions?"

"Well, there was one thing, but it can't be of any importance. When he was leaving he rolled a cigarette and I noticed that he rolled it inward. When he makes his own cigarettes he always rolls them outward and he told me once that was the proper way. This was why I noticed it, but I suppose it was nervousness that caused him to change."

"Um," ejaculated Clarke, meditatively. "Have you seen Mr. Edgerton this morning?"

"No, I was going there after seeing you, but I dread the crowds and the notoriety."

"Clarke Has Taken the Case."

"I think I can give you a card which will secure you from annoyance."

"Oh, thank you. Is there anything else?"

"No, Miss Morrison. Tell Mr. Edgerton for me that we may clear him in spite of himself."

"Then you will help?"

"Madam, I have already taken the case."

When she left, Clarke's eyes danced with excitement.

"What do you think of it now?" he asked.

"I can't see a ray of light, can you?" I replied.

"Isn't she a wonderful woman to think of this thing like that cigarette? You and I, Sexton, know something of the obsessions of a cigarette-smoker, and that his prejudices are as inflexible as the laws of the Medes and Persians. I don't know what it means now, but I will. But let's go. I'm anxious to have a look at that auto before it is removed. I suppose the police have paved over it now until there'll be no finding out anything from it."

When we reached the scene of the tragedy we found the machine standing apparently just as the murderer had left it, the front wheels in the ditch and the hind wheels elevated by the grade of the roadway. A dark pool of blood in the tonneau told its own story. The motor was guarded by a solitary policeman, who kept at bay a gaping crowd of curiosity seekers.

Clarke and I had some difficulty with the majesty of the law, but an air of authority and a cigar finally won the day.

"Is the machine just as it was when the body was removed?" queried Clarke.

"Yes, sir. It's not to be touched till the coroner has a look at it." "O, would like to give him a dialect, but truth demands that he speaks remarkably good English."

Clarke gave the machine a most critical examination, promising the officer he would leave it just as he found it. He peeped under the hood, tested the spark, noted the supply of gasoline, and noticed the course of a bullet along the leather of the rear seat.

"An automatic," he quietly remarked. "Nothing but a steel-jacketed bullet could go clear through the body of a man and then cut so clean a furrow. There are no signs of a struggle. The polish of that woodwork hasn't a scratch on it, which wouldn't be likely if there had been a fight. Officers, are you sure these levers haven't been touched since the body was found?"

"Yes, sir. I came with the wagon last night and they were just that way. The lieutenant left Clancy to guard it and I relieved him at 8. Neither of us have touched them."

"Well, then, Sexton, we might as well go back to town; we can't learn anything more here."

On the return Clarke was immersed in his own thoughts and I did not interrupt him, but as we neared our corner he turned to me and said: "So you still think Arthur Edgerton committed that murder?"

"I have learned nothing to change my opinion," I replied.

"Well, I have, Sexton. It is my solemn judgment that Edgerton was not in that automobile when the killing was done. It's a simple little thing, but to me it's conclusive. The machine was set on the secondary speed. The gasoline tank was almost empty and the oil-cups dry as a bone. Whoever ran that car was afraid of the high speed, and he had been burning up the engine and squandering the gasoline to make time. When he stopped he left the throttle

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sometimes have weak links and then the whole chain is worthless. We have found two weak links; the motives and the levers. I might add a third, the cigarette; but here we are out of the tunnel and at the city hall."

Asks to Be Locked Up.

When we entered the gloomy corridors of Central station, Clarke at once sought out Inspector Ship, who happened to be in charge, and begged for an interview with Edgerton.

"I'd like to favor you, Mr. Clarke," said the inspector, "although it's very irregular. I can't refer to you as his lawyer, as he has refused to employ one; still I can't forget several little turns you have done for me, and so I'll see if he wants to talk to you."

Here we met a stumbling-block of formidable proportions. Inspector Ship returned with the word that the prisoner absolutely refused to see any one.

"Then, inspector, I wish you would lock me up in the cage next to Edgerton, and preferably on the side his bunk is on, if that one is empty. You can do that, can't you, and leave me there for an hour? I may be able to interest him through the grating."

"Well, I guess I can, but it isn't often they come here asking to be locked up. Come on down stairs."

"Better go out and have your luncheon in the meantime, Sexton."

"I didn't lead you on a false scent."

"What devil's trick is this you're playing on me, Mr. Clarke?" roared the inspector. "We left this man at the station not half an hour ago. How comes it that you lead me here in a false scent and then drag my own prisoner out of that room and force me to slug him?"

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It lasted. Two men were locked in deadly embrace, reeling about the room, overturning tables and chairs, while a third circled around them watching for a chance to administer the quietus with the butt of a pistol.

The man in the embrace of the stranger was Clarke. The one with the pistol was the inspector. The stranger had a long knife in his right hand which he was trying to bring to bear on Clarke's anatomy, but I was pleased to note that the wrist of the hand that held the blade was encircled with four fingers and a thumb that I knew possessed a grip like a pipe-wrench.

The affair could have but one ending, and I did not see that I could be of any use. With one powerful effort Clarke brought his opponent's head within range of the butt of the inspector's revolver, there was a quick thud, and a limp form slipped out of his arms to the floor.

Despite the blood which ran down his face from the cut in his forehead, the grime, and the torn clothing and disheveled hair, I knew him from the pictures that filled the day's papers. It was Arthur Edgerton.

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